

MINUTES
Alaska Resource Advisory Council Meeting
Northern Field Office ~ Fairbanks, AK
April 29-30, 2004

Thursday, April 29, 2004

Council members present:

Charlie Boddy
Tom Crafford, Chair
Phil Driver
Randy Frank
Gary Gustafson
Teresa Imm
Sandra Key
Suzanne McCarthy
Susan Olsen
Jim Posey
David van den Berg

BLM representatives present:

Henri Bisson, State Director
Peter Ditton, Associate State Director
June Bailey, Anchorage Field Office
Ramone McCoy, Glennallen Field Office
Bob Schneider, Northern Field Office
George Oviatt, Resources
Debbie Hollen, Resources
Scott Billing, Alaska Fire Service
Mary Lynch, Alaska Fire Service
Kato Howard, Alaska Fire Service
Teresa McPherson, External Affairs

Council members absent:

Jim Posey
Larry Taylor
Evie Witten

Chair Tom Crafford called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m. The council reviewed and accepted the agenda and approved minutes of the Feb. 5-6, 2004, RAC meeting as written.

State Director's Update

State Director Henri Bisson announced several staff changes at BLM: acting Associate State Director Peter Ditton will transfer to D.C., George Oviatt will assume the acting associate position, and Debbie Hollen will be acting deputy for Resources.

- **Northwest National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska:** Bisson gave RAC members a copy of the *Federal Register* notice announcing a June 2 lease sale for 5.8 million acres in the Northwest study area of the petroleum reserve. Bisson said environmental groups have filed a motion to block the June lease sale, but BLM plans to proceed unless ordered to do otherwise.
- **Northeast National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska:** The draft amendment is due out shortly. BLM's preferred alternative puts more protections on the ground while making Alaska's resources available to help reduce dependency on foreign oil. Under the preferred alternative,

BLM estimates production at 200,000 barrels per day, which would save about \$7 million per day in export dollars.

The preferred alternative would make 213,000 acres in the Teshekpuk Lake area off limits to leasing. The draft would be out in May, followed by a 45-day comment period.

- **Alpine Satellite:** The final EIS is on schedule and will be out in July. BLM met with Nuiqsut residents to discuss their concerns about potential impacts to caribou. BLM assured residents the road would be carefully located to protect resources and do the least harm. BLM worked with the North Slope Borough on an agreement to resolve legal issues involving subsistence cabins in the area.

Bisson said a petition was filed with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to list the yellow-billed loon as threatened, and asked Debbie Hollen to provide details. Hollen said the FWS has 90 days to determine if the petition is substantial. This finding would initiate a one-year study period to determine whether to formally list the species.

- **North Slope Science Initiative (NSSI):** BLM has developed a charter for the oversight group and will now take steps to charter the science technical group under the Federal Advisory Committee Act. BLM is also classifying a position to coordinate the NSSI. BLM anticipates funding for the NSSI by the end of the year.

One RAC member asked how the Research and Monitoring Team would fit into the NSSI. Bisson said the science technical group would address monitoring, although details were not yet worked out. Sandra Key was concerned about the specific role of the RMT being adequately addressed in a broad effort like the NSSI, and hoped the RMT would operate as a subgroup under the NSSI.

- **Recordable disclaimers:** Sen. Joe Lieberman (D-Conn.) wrote the Secretary challenging BLM's decision to disclaim the Black River. BLM has drafted a response to address his concerns. BLM has received five additional applications for recordable disclaimers from the state. The state has also asked BLM to issue a disclaimer for portions of a river within Wood-Tikchik State Park. BLM is working with the Regional Solicitor to explore if we can issue a blanket disclaimer for all areas where BLM has no federal interest.

Susan Olsen asked if BLM will use the disclaimer process for R.S. 2477's. Bisson said the Secretary has said BLM will not do so in Alaska. Olsen requested the RAC receive copies of the Lieberman letter and BLM's response.

- **Accelerated land transfer program:** Bisson attended a Senate hearing on S. 1466 in Feb. BLM has since worked with Alaska Native interests to revise certain language in the bill. BLM hopes the bill will be attached to legislation soon. The most significant hurdle is Sec. 209 that would allow BLM to lift segregations via *Federal Register* notice once we complete conveyance in a given region. This would make Alaska consistent with other states.
- **East Alaska RMP:** BLM decided to delay scheduled public meetings to first meet with DNR to discuss how to plan for state-selected lands. It's important to consult with the

eventual landowner before laying out alternatives that affect those lands. BLM wants to address the issue of how to plan for lands where we have only interim responsibility, to find a consistent approach that considers the future landowners' needs.

BREAK

Susan Olsen asked for clarification of a topic from the Feb. RAC meeting regarding Alaska Native corporations and government-to-government consultation. Olsen said she reviewed the section of the appropriations bill Henri Bisson referenced at the Feb. meeting, but felt it was specific to OMB.

Bisson said he would ask BLM's Alaska Native liaison Brenda Takes Horse to research this topic and provide follow-up to the RAC.

Field Manager Updates

Ramone McCoy, Glennallen Field Office

- BLM will hold public meetings in May and June to present alternatives for the East Alaska RMP. OHV use is the primary issue raised at earlier public meetings.
- Archaeologist John Jangala presented his studies of ancient Lake Ahtna at a recent anthropological conference in Canada. Eighty percent of the sites studied in the Gulkana River basin yielded evidence of human prehistory. The RAC asked for copies of Jangala's paper and the Lake Ahtna map.
- GFO issued about 1,000 subsistence permits for moose and over 2,400 permits for caribou.
- GFO compiled visitor use data for 2003. Overall visitor use on GFO lands is down slightly.
- BLM has stepped up monitoring activities for the Arctic Man competition due to increased numbers of participants. An estimated 13,000 people attended the 5-day event. BLM is meeting with the permittee today to resolve problems following the event.
- GFO issued four heliski permits for 2004. These are one-year permits since the East Alaska plan will address these activities in the future.

June Bailey, Anchorage Field Office

- BLM is developing alternatives for the Ring of Fire RMP and plans to have a draft out for public review early in 2005. Much of area thought to hold coalbed resources is state selected.
- BLM has begun preplanning for The Bay RMP (Bristol Bay area). Scoping will begin in 2005. This plan will address a large number of ANILCA "d(1)" lands. Issues include easements, recreation use, subsistence and mineral development. This plan will consider lifting withdrawals to open lands that are currently withdrawn from mineral development.
- The Campbell Tract draft master plan was released in March. Subject to funding, the next step will be design work in fiscal years '05 and '06.
- BLM met with Placer Dome Mining to discuss development of the Donlin Creek Mine. Placer Dome is collecting data to determine access routes, power sources, rights of way and other issues. They have not applied for permits as yet.

- BLM is doing assessment work at a mink farm along the Unalakleet River. The site is a rare intact example of fur farms that operated in western Alaska in the early 1900's.
- BLM evaluated a site in the Knik area for a public use cabin. However, the land is Native selected and no other site in this area was deemed suitable. Henri Bisson said there was a draft memo in RAC members' packets instructing field managers to evaluate the need for additional public use cabins during land use planning. RAC members will receive a copy once the memo is issued.

Bob Schneider, Northern Field Office

- Schneider summarized winter operations in the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska.
- The subsistence panel met in March and attended a field inspection at a drilling operation. Nuiqsut residents had concerns about small fish pumped into ice roads when a contractor used faulty screens. BLM now requires Fish and Game approved equipment.
- Initial scoping meetings were held for the Kobuk-Seward Peninsula RMP. Issues raised included user conflicts, subsistence concerns, need for shelter cabins across Seward Peninsula to support summer tourism and safe travel via snow machine in winter, and fire management relative to caribou habitat.
- BLM issued a special recreation use permit for the Yukon Quest International Sled Dog Race, held in Feb. The event was later determined to be out of compliance due to inadequate cleanup. BLM is working with event organizers to resolve these issues, and will increase the bond next year. RAC members noted this appears to be a trend, and urged BLM to increase enforcement and deal promptly with those who violate permit requirements.
- A state senator from Fairbanks introduced a bill to open the Dalton Highway corridor to casual OHV use (current statute allows OHV travel for mining and oil and gas purposes only). The RAC discussed OHV issues associated with commercial trapping activities in the corridor. Bisson asked Schneider to provide the RAC with the policy BLM really folks use to determine if a cabin is used for valid trapping activities.
- BLM received preplanning funding for the South National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska/Colville RMP.

LUNCH

The meeting resumed with public comment at 1 pm.

Bill Robertson: Robertson retired from BLM in 1994. He thanked the council for making the time for advisory council service and noted many of the issues BLM deals with today are much the same as a decade ago.

Charlie Boddy said he worked with Robertson while serving on BLM's Northern Advisory Council some years ago, and enjoyed a good working relationship.

Secretary's Alaska Visit

Gary Gustafson expressed disappointment that Secretary Norton didn't meet with the RAC during her current visit to Alaska. Keith Tryck said he spoke with Norton the previous evening and asked if she'd drop by the RAC meeting. Norton said her schedule was focused on Fish and Wildlife Service issues this trip.

The RAC asked that the minutes reflect their dismay that during this and prior visits to Alaska, the Secretary had not met with the Alaska RAC.

Research and Monitoring Team Meeting, April 14-15, 2004

Bob Schneider thanked Sandra Key, Gary Gustafson and Teresa Imm for attending portions of the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska Research and Monitoring Team meeting.

Schneider provided a summary of the meeting.

- The RMT brainstormed the essential elements of a monitoring strategy that would promote adaptive management, encourage joint monitoring efforts, identify key variables, and distinguish natural versus human-caused changes related to development.
- The group's consensus was for the RMT to provide sideboards for BLM to develop a monitoring strategy. The RMT would then provide peer review.
- The RMT hopes to have a monitoring plan in place before the Northeast amendment is out, and would like assurance that this plan would be reflected in the Northeast decision.
- BLM's RMT member, Dave Yokel, and RMT industry representative Caryn Rae of ConocoPhillips would coordinate a monitoring strategy for Alpine Satellite Development.
- The group had concerns about the role of the RMT in the North Slope Science Initiative.

Sandra Key said RMT members are energized about continuing their work, but are also concerned about funding for monitoring. They had concerns about the role of the RMT once the NSSI is in place. She said if Bisson could attend the June 2 RMT meeting, it would reinforce BLM's commitment to their work.

The RAC discussed their role relative to the RMT, and agreed it's important to define that role better in the future before establishing a subgroups. The RAC discussed the role of subgroups versus technical review teams, as referenced in the charter. Bisson felt the RMT was more of a technical review team according to the charter, but agreed it would be helpful for a RAC member to attend RMT meetings.

BREAK

RAC Planning Liaison Reports

The RAC discussed the role of planning liaisons. It was generally agreed that liaisons provide a link between specific RMP efforts and the RAC by working with planning leads, attending public meetings when possible, and briefing the RAC on major issues during council meetings.

- East Alaska: Susan Olsen said the Mat-Su meeting was rescheduled to June 1 and the Anchorage meeting is June 2. Her subgroup will meet with GFO planning staff June 1. Olsen encouraged RAC members to attend public meetings during RMP planning.
- Ring of Fire: Charlie Boddy said he and Sandra Key met with June Bailey and planning lead Bob Lloyd in early April. Split estate (surface/subsurface resources) is the major issue in this plan. He said Bailey and Lloyd were very helpful in understanding these issues.
- Kobuk/Seward Peninsula: Phil Driver said he attended the scoping meeting and said BLM gave a good overview of the resources of this region. Major issues include subsistence, user conflicts, concerns about Red Dog Mine, water quality, and road development.
- Northeast National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska: Teresa Imm, Charlie Boddy, and Randy Frank said they would review the draft amendment due out later in May. Henri Bisson suggested BLM meet with this subgroup to go over the plan before public release.
- South National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska: David van den Berg said he would like to meet with BLM during preplanning.
- Fire Plan Amendment: Keith Tryck gave an overview of this amendment and said the Alaska Fire Service would provide additional details during a presentation the following day.

Meeting recessed at 4 p.m.

Friday, February 6, 2004

Council members not present: same as day one, plus Sandra Key. Evie Witten joined via teleconference. The chair called the meeting to order at 8:40 a.m.

Alaska Fire Service

Kato Howard, BLM's fuels management specialist, discussed the 2004 fuels management program. Howard discussed wildland urban interface projects, rural fire assistance, fire suppression levels, risk assessment and mitigation strategies, and fire education and prevention programs. Howard gave RAC members a list of planned fuels reduction and prescribed fire projects for this season.

Mary Lynch explained BLM is currently amending land use plans to include fuels management objectives. Previously, these objectives were part of a single statewide fire plan, but the Bureau felt inserting language directly into land use plans reinforces fuels management objectives.

RAC Subgroup Reports

OHV subgroup

Susan Olsen said the OHV subgroup is currently focusing on the East Alaska plan. The subgroup obtained a trail matrix from GFO that lists trails and associated concerns. They also reviewed management strategies for both OHV and non-motorized uses.

The subgroup met following the RAC meeting the day before, and agreed OHV use must be managed and some limitations are appropriate. They also agreed on the need for more enforcement and education. Olsen said the subgroup will meet with East Alaska planners before the public meeting June 2.

The chair suggested the subgroup draft a resolution for the RAC to consider at the next meeting.

Public Use Recreation Cabin subgroup

Gary Gustafson thanked Bisson for drafting a memo instructing field managers to evaluate the need for additional public use cabins during land use planning.

Gustafson said he understood that the Knik area was state-selected, but felt there might be similar areas for public use cabins if BLM coordinated with the state first. Ramone McCoy said GFO is talking with the state about partnership opportunities for public use cabins.

The group briefly discussed unauthorized cabins and associated liability and safety issues. Bisson said BLM could put together a briefing on this topic for the October meeting. Tom Crafford said this was an important issue to the mining community, since it creates problems for legitimate mining users. The group agreed to explore the topic further at the Oct. meeting.

Standards and Guidelines subgroup

David van den Berg said Henri Bisson had approved the standards as supplementary planning guidance, so this subgroup could be retired. Bob Schneider said this guidance was recently provided to the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska Research and Monitoring Team for their use in developing a monitoring strategy.

2004 RAC Nominations

Teresa McPherson said BLM Alaska received eight nominations. Three of these were from current members seeking renomination. Henri Bisson will review the list, coordinate with the State, and then forward his recommendations to the Secretary by mid June. Appointments will be announced in Sept. and become effective Oct. 1.

July Field Tour, July 29-31

June Bailey proposed an outline for the July 29-31 field tour to the Unalakleet River.

July 29:

- Depart Anchorage via charter 11 a.m. Box lunches en route. Arrive Unalakleet airfield 1 p.m.
- Community meeting in Unalakleet, 1:30 p.m.
- After meeting, boat upriver to camp site at Ryan's Cabin or on gravel bar, depending on water level. BLM to provide tents, sleeping bags, and meals.
- Dinner in camp. Informal time in the evening to discuss community meeting, other issues.

July 30:

- Breakfast in camp. Board boats for trip on the river.
- Stop at historic mink farm, site of new stream gauge, and new sign identifying wild and scenic river corridor.
- Late lunch at Unalakleet Lodge; return to camp site.
- Informal discussion in camp; dinner in camp.

July 31:

- Breakfast in camp. Board boats to return to Unalakleet.
- Lunch in Unalakleet.
- Board charter; arrive in Anchorage mid-afternoon.

Bailey said she would provide a briefing packet to the RAC prior to the trip. The packet would include maps and a list of management issues/concerns for this area. BLM will also provide a list of suggested items for RAC members to bring, and a list of what items will be provided.

Bailey asked for a tentative head count of those who planned to make the trip. Keith Tryck and David van den Berg were uncertain they could make it. All others present plan to attend.

Unalakleet meeting agenda: RAC members agreed to consider the OHV subgroup resolution (to be provided in advance of the meeting) and to hear updates about the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska and Alpine Satellite Development. However, the RAC agreed to devote the majority of the meeting to hearing from local residents about their concerns, and save other discussions for informal time during the river trip.

Adjourn 10:55 a.m.